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SUBJECT: Candidates React to Regime Crackdown

¶1. (U) On March 26, opposition presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich issued a statement expressing solidarity with all those beaten and arrested by authorities on March 25, including his rival opposition leader Aleksandr Kozulin. Expressing his desire to continue to challenge the illegitimate Lukashenko regime, but acknowledging the still relatively small number of people willing to protest publicly, Milinkevich announced he would initiate an information campaign to expose the Belarusian people to the truth about Lukashenko's misrule. He added his team had made a list of those officials responsible for the arrests and violence and had forwarded it to relevant international organizations. Lastly, while expressing solidarity with Kozulin in jail, Milinkevich implicitly rebuked his rival for leading the doomed march to a police detention center by stating that Belarusian opposition politicians should behave responsibly. (See paragraph 4 for an informal translation of the text.)

¶2. (SBU) On March 26, a strongly worded statement appeared in the state and independent media, purportedly issued by Kozulin's staff, calling Milinkevich a traitor to the cause of freedom. However, a senior aide to Kozulin told Poloff March 28 that no one on the Kozulin staff had authored this statement, suggesting that the GOB fabricated it to stoke the flames of tension between Kozulin and Milinkevich. (See paragraph 5 for an informal translation of the text.)

¶3. (U) The Kozulin team did claim authorship of a March 26 press statement protesting Kozulin's March 25 arrest and announcing that no one still knows Kozulin's whereabouts. This statement blamed police Colonel Dmitry Pavlichenko for again leading police violence, and expressed support with all those detained. The statement concluded with calls upon the EU, U.S. and Russia to help prevent future political repression in Belarus, but made no criticism of Milinkevich's earlier radio interview statements rebuking Kozulin for leading the march. (See paragraph 6 for an informal translation of the text.)

¶4. (U) Begin informal translation of Milinkevich's statement:

"Statement of Alexander Milinkevich on the harsh break-up of a peaceful demonstration in Minsk on March 25.

The Belarusian regime has once again shown us, citizens of Belarus, and the world community its true face. The beating of peaceful people is yet another attempt of the authorities to return the society to the state of total fear, which it started to decisively and irrevocably come out from.

The use of force against the group of peaceful demonstrators shows cowardice of the ruling regime, which is incapable of controlling of the situation in the country through common democratic procedures. The government, which used militia and

special means and dispersed peaceful demonstrators with animal cruelty, fully annihilated its prestige and lost people's support.

Such actions cannot be forgiven. Such a government is worth the people's contempt.

I state my full solidarity with the people beaten up and arrested on March 25. Citizens of Belarus took to the streets of Minsk to express their protest to the regime which rigs elections, lies daily on the situation in and outside the country, arrests and jails its opponents on far-fetched grounds. The right to protest peacefully is granted by the main law of our country, the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. The actions of peaceful demonstrators posed no threat to public order; the accusations brought against them by state bodies is a blatant lie voiced by the law-enforcement top-brass.

I will forward the full names of masterminds, organizers and executors of the break-up of a peaceful demonstration to the relevant international organizations for the purpose of applying appropriate sanctions against them. The actions of these individuals will be adjudicated in a democratic Belarus.

Similarly, I believe that in conditions of open aggression towards civil society shown by the government, every Belarusian politician should care about the fate of his fellow countrymen, make balanced and responsible political decisions, calculate in advance all consequences of his statements and activities.

We are committed to continue peaceful mass protests against rigging presidential election results, for the reestablishment in the country of constitutional law and democracy. We will not wait another five years to liberate the people of Belarus from

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the power of those who long ago lost the legal and moral rights to this power. I am convinced that a broad all-national movement for the freedom of Belarus, whose establishment I announced at the March 25 rally, will perform its historic mission for the sake of the people and the state." End text.

End Text.

15. (U) Begin informal translation of the alleged March 25 Kozulin campaign team statement:

COWARDS PROVE THEIR INNOCENCE, HEROES ARE SILENT

Today, March 25, 2006 the regime removed the last barrier that separated it from the abyss. It started murdering, crippling and trampling peaceful citizens. With the hands of its dogs led by Pavlichenko and Karpenkov it leveled with the asphalt of Minsk streets law, justice, freedom, life and health of those, whom it hysterically fears. It fears our people, our citizens!

Today's march to Okrestina for the purpose of supporting its inmates and all political prisoners in Belarus was totally peaceful. People marched with smiles, flowers and were accompanied by clergy. Not even traffic regulations were violated; there were no violations whatsoever. Passers-by and vehicle drivers felt solidarity with people marching to Okrestina. The regime was scared, it provoked a clash. It attacked a peaceful protest; negotiators led by Kozulin, clergy and threw grenades at demonstrators.

The regime got frightened with what its dog Pavlichenko did and squirms trying to blame Kozulin and people who followed him. This is disgusting; this is not nice, but not surprising. We have known this regime long ago and have no illusion about them. They will find themselves behind bars. The Lord's and people's trials are only a matter of time for them.

Even more disgusting was the behavior of the so-called democrat Milinkevich and a group of his accomplices. He felt jealous of

Kozulin all along since March 19 and had no will-power to become the first, despite all the money, PR, support of all Europe and the U.S.. Milinkevich realized that and played dirty tricks on his colleague/competitor. Kozulin never hit him back, he tolerated all that for the sake of unity of people, for victory, for people that follow them. Today, however, Milinkevich apparently got frightened.

Milinkevich did not allow Kozulin to use a microphone at a rally near Kupala monument and explain to people what should be done. Milinkevich ignored the people's intention to go liberate their brothers and sisters imprisoned at Okrestina. Thus, Milinkevich betrayed the course of freedom. Now, Milinkevich is at large, while Kozulin was beaten up and his whereabouts are not known. Pavlichenko personally handles his case. Now, Milinkevich gives interviews trying to justify himself and "stay away" from Kozulin's "provocations". Milinkevich plays for the regime and blames those who cannot talk back. He acts against conscience, blaming without basis his colleague, who finds himself in trouble.

Kozulin never called upon anyone to remove Lukashenko or seize state organizations. He marched with people observing all rules. He walked with flowers with a smile on his face and wanted to support people at Okrestina and demand decent prison conditions.

Milinkevich was not with the people, while Kozulin was. He did his utmost to avoid violence. He walked with a group of clergy and youth and intended to stop Pavlichenko.

Milinkevich's statement, in which he virtually blamed Kozulin for clashes with the regime is nothing but lies and provocation. Kozulin has always been an opponent of violence. There are hundreds of witnesses, who can confirm that this protest was peaceful.

Most of the detained are Milinkevich's supporters. Still, they followed Kozulin and their eyes opened. Maybe Milinkevich is the regime's project? Now, we have all reasons to think about it.

End Text.

16. (U) Begin informal translation of the March 25 Kozulin campaign team statement:

" Statement of the Presidium of the Belarusian social Democratic party (Gramada)

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On March 25, 2006, at the time of a peaceful demonstration many participants of the protest, including the leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Gramada) were detained.

While law-enforcement bodies must within three hours advise people of their relatives' detention and must advise of their whereabouts, Alexander Kozulin's relatives and party members were not informed of his fate.

Belarusian authorities demonstrated again their readiness to secure a bankrupt regime with the use of truncheons and muscles of special forces. Again, Colonel Dmitry Pavlichenko got into the spotlight; he personally commanded the cruel break-up of a peaceful protest. Many participants of the demonstration, including the leader of the Belarusian Social Democrats were beaten up.

The Belarusian Social Democratic party expresses its support to their leader, his fellow party members and all citizens, who find themselves in limited-freedom facilities or prisons for political reasons. We demand their immediate release.

We appeal to the leaders of the EU member states, presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States of America to prevent stronger political repression in the Republic of Belarus and cease the harassment of dissidents."

End text.

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